

Africa

THE LAND OF POSSIBILITIES



Africa



Africa is fast becoming known the world over as the land of possibilities. In the providence of God, the Dark Continent, so long a closed book to the rest of the world, is becoming an open one and, although there are still vast numbers of natives unreached by the white man, the advances made in recent years have been phenomenal.

The Country

Africa is the second largest continent, and embraces eleven and a half million square miles, mostly tropical, with huge forests, vast deserts and wide plateaus filled with big game. Wide spread epidemics of malaria, African sleeping sickness, etc., have helped keep the population of many areas relatively sparse. But the highlands of Central Africa, free to a great degree from those diseases, are much more thickly populated, and modern medical

science is fast removing the health-hazards of the past even from the lowlands. In the extreme north and south the climate of Africa is sub-tropical and salubrious.

The People

There are at least one hundred and fifty million people in Africa, of whom about five million are of European descent. Most of these latter live in South Africa. The three largest divisions of the native population are the desert or Arabic types of North Africa, the Nilotic and the Bantu strains of Negroes who live from a few degrees north of the Equator to the extreme south of the continent.

Languages and Literacy

These families are subdivided into a great many tribes speaking about 523 distinct languages and more than 300 dialects. The Nilotic peoples speak languages which are intonated. The languages of the Bantu peoples have a peculiar but intricate structure, such as the classification of nouns, but with regular accents. The Arabic and Amharic tongues of North Africa and Ethiopia have their own script. The Nilotic and Bantu tongues have been unwritten. These latter are being reduced to writing mainly through the efforts of missionaries. Much remains to be done. It naturally follows that illiteracy is widespread. Among the negro peoples it has been universal. The governments have more recently paid some attention to the task. But education of most

of the native peoples of central and south Africa remains in the hands of Christian missions.

Religions

It is estimated that there are at least ninety million pagans in Africa. By these are meant men, women and children who, though they have a vague idea of a Creator, are largely occupied in appeasing evil spirits of ancestors or demons, accepted as the causes of most of the sickness or misfortune of life. Witchcraft is rampant. They have priests, ritual, and sacrifices directed mainly to these spirits. Theirs is a life of fear and torment. The witch-doctors are their priests, and are regarded with terror because of their power to harm as well as to help in times of trouble.

It is a sad commentary upon the neglect of the Christian Church that there are forty-five million Mohammedans in Africa. If the early church, which was planted in North Africa soon after the days of the Apostles, had been obedient to the Great Commission, things would be very different now. Because those early believers disputed over non-essentials and even trivialities, the great masses of people were left without the Gospel. The declension of the early Church in North Africa gave the opportunity to the followers of Mohammed to cross from Arabia and, by the use of the sword, to plant the crescent among these millions of Africans having a small, largely formal and lifeless Coptic Church.

Political Situation

It must be admitted that, with but a few exceptions in North Africa and Ethiopia, the African peoples are not ready for self-government. Nor is there any real movement in that direction on the part of the Africans themselves. However cynically we may view the exploitation of these lands and peoples by colonial governments yet we must acknowledge that without them vast areas would rapidly return to intertribal chaos. The near future may well be different.

Missionary Activity

Within two centuries after Pentecost nine hundred strong churches had been established in Africa along the Mediterranean coast, and a missionary training school founded in Alexandria. Apostasy here was followed by the advent of Mohammedanism. Later some work along the west coast and in South Africa was followed by the journeys of Livingstone and the penetration of the vast interior of the continent. The problems have been staggering. Due to the absolute absence of literacy in so much of Africa, and due to the mass of sickness and suffering not otherwise relieved, educational and medical work, not essentially spiritual in nature or elsewhere so necessary, have been indispensable here as parts of the missionary task. The problems involved especially in the tremendous changes

of later years, continue to challenge the brightest minds, the highest statesmanship and the most profound spiritual discernment of the Christian Church. And this applies no less to the great Mohammedan areas of the North. Due mainly to political reasons some parts of Africa are still closed to the Gospel. And there certainly remain considerable areas and populations untouched. To a remarkable degree, however, through the handful of missionaries, the Lord has scattered lightly held missionary centers right through the heart of the continent. The estimate of those who have given the closest attention to the subject places the number of Africans who are still beyond the reach of present missionary forces somewhere between fifty and seventy millions. The greatest area and the most neglected field is still that of the Mohammedan people.

The Christian Church

There is reason to believe that there must be at least two millions of born-again believers among the natives of Africa, while there are many more enquirers, almost persuaded, for whom we should especially pray. After the seed sowing of these few decades a time of harvest has come. A church, *His* church is coming into being. If in some parts of Africa this is marred by human factions, that is not everywhere true. Indeed this church is rich in the fruit of the Spirit and abundantly blessed with the gifts of the Spirit.

The Opportunity

It may well be that, should our Lord tarry and should the church awake to the present opportunities and needs, the number of missionaries needed in Africa could in a reasonable time be materially decreased. Whatever is done in Africa demands immediate action, we dare not delay. The open but unreached areas cry for witness now, and seed sowing is ever urgent. We see here, too, an abundant harvest ripe for the gathering. We see those few missionaries in their scattered stations, often in the midst of vast unreached areas, overwhelmed with the abundance of that harvest. Their extremity calls loudly to the Church of Christ. *Now* is the time to bring the message of reconciliation and salvation to Africa's multitudes. *Now*, the African church needs Bible teaching of such character and proportions as the present native ministry is as yet far from being equal to give. *Now*, those Africans blessed with evident gifts of the Spirit need that training for leadership and ministry which has been well described as "the key to the missionary problem." *Now*, the native Christian, not yet finding any other human help in frequent times of sickness and accident, needs the comfort and help of Christian doctors and nurses.

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